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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, January 8, 1934

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Subject: "Food Advice for the Neglected Age." Information approved by the
Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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Saturday night my Next-Door Neighbor came over to pay me a call -- we hadn't seen each other since Friday -- and to read snatches from a new Christmas cookbook, "Strange News from China."

"It's full of good advice," explained my Neighbor. "Listen to this -- a Chinese proverb: If you want your dinner nicely cooked, don't offend the cook."

Very good advice, I told my friend. It always pays to be on good terms with the cook.

The next proverb she read was this: "One can give up his father and mother but no one can give up the sauce made from the So fish."

"What's a So fish?" I asked.

"Don't know," said my neighbor. "I've never been to China -- but it must be a wonderful fish, if a sauce made from it can cause an Oriental to give up his father and mother. Do you know," she went on, "that the Chinese god of the kitchen is known as Chang? In a Chinese kitchen, there's always a little shelf over the stove, and offerings of food for Chang and his wife are placed on this shelf. A pleasant custom. Shall I read on?"

"Do," I urged her. "I never miss a chance to improve my mind."

"Here's an improving verse," said my friend.

"The man whose face is thick and tough
At feasts will always get enough;
But he whose face is always thin,
Can't even get his chopsticks in."

"That verse," said my neighbor, "reminds me of the boy who gave me this book. His face is always thin -- poor fellow."

Not until then did it dawn on me that my friend had come over for the express purpose of getting advice, of some kind.

"Out with it," I said -- "What is the object of your Saturday night visit? What is all this Chinese proverb business leading up to?"

"Oh, that's the new method of approach," she explained. "The idea is to be subtle -- don't come right out and say what you want -- don't you see?"

"No," I said. "I'm not a Chinaman -- I'm not thin -- I don't offend the cook -- what has all this nonsense to do with me?"

"Simply this," replied my Neighbor. "The boy who gave me this book needs some special advice on what to eat. He has reached what I call the neglected age. That's somewhere between 16 and 25. He's still in college. What would you tell girls and boys between 16 and 25, about their eating habits, Aunt Sammy?"

Well, the first thing I thought of was a statement made by Dr. Mary Swartz Rose, a well known professor of nutrition at Columbia University. Said Mrs. Rose: "A little thought, a little self-control, and then forget that there is such a thing as digestion." But of course, as my neighbor reminded me, before we forget there is such a thing as digestion, we should know the fundamental principles of nutrition.

By the end of the sixteenth year, Mrs. Rose says, by the end of the sixteenth year good food habits in eating ought to be well established, and the digestive system should be strong enough to care for all reasonably wholesome food. Up to the age of sixteen, the majority of children have been in school. After reaching this ripe age, some go on to school, and others go to work.

But even after the age of sixteen nearly all persons continue to increase in weight, and many in height, for at least four or five years. Twenty-five years round out the growing period, and then we have what Mrs. Rose calls "that fine working machine, the adult man or woman."

Now let's take several different young people, and consider their food problems. Here's a big strong, husky boy who starts to work when he's 17 or 18. He works outdoors. He will thrive on such food as pork and beans, cabbage and potatoes, cornbread, milk, and apple pie.

"Outdoor life," quoting Mrs. Rose again, "outdoor life and fresh air are sauce to the appetite and tonic to the digestion."

So much for the boy who leads an active outdoor life.

Now we'll take up the case of another young fellow -- let's say a bank clerk. He sits all day in a warm, rather close room. The only exercise he gets is walking a block or so, to and from the car-line. A heavy diet would be entirely too much for him. However, he does need three regular meals, each one fairly substantial, even though his appetite is not so keen nor his digestion so vigorous as that of the boy who works outdoors all day long.

Girls who work indoors are more likely to suffer from fickle appetite than are young men. They are tempted to make their daily diet consist of pickles and candy and soda fountain specials -- not a well-balanced menu for Miss Sixteen.

Mrs. Rose suggests a number of good luncheons for the adolescent -- luncheons which provide the proper amount of fuel for the sedentary worker, that is, the person who sits most of the day. One of these lunch menus includes cream of tomato soup, toast, butter, and rice pudding. Another -- bean soup, corn bread and butter, and chocolate blanc mange with thin cream.

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Here's still another good one: Creamed dried beef, baked potato, baking powder biscuit and butter, sliced bananas with sugar and thin cream.

Our next problem concerns the young man and the young woman, between 18 and 23 or 24, who are completing their educations. Says Mrs. Rose: "It is not always realized that these are years for storing capital physically as well as mentally... What we need is... to make every college table a training table for high physical resistance in future years."

Nowadays, most college dining halls are supervised by expert dietitians, who give the students what is good for them -- so parents needn't worry about whether their children are getting a well-balanced diet.

I happen to know my Neighbor's young friend -- the boy who gave her the book for Christmas. He's working his way through school, and I imagine he finds it rather hard to make his pay check stand the strain of all college expenses -- food included. Sometimes young men and young women don't believe -- until it's too late -- that it's mighty poor economy to cut down on certain important foods. Prolonged underfeeding in the critical years between 18 and 24 may result in breakdowns at 35 or 40.

The college youth needs an ample diet of plain food, fairly rich in building materials. The diet should include milk, fruits and vegetables, plenty of whole wheat bread, and cereals from whole grains. On a cold Saturday, after hours of exercise out of doors, students will relish a good hearty supper, with mince pie as dessert. But on week-days, when there is studying to be done in the evenings, a lighter meal is sufficient. One of the dinner menus suggested by Mrs. Rose includes a thick soup, a cereal pudding with fruit, and plenty of bread and butter.

"School is dismissed," said my Next-Door-Neighbor, when I got to this point. "I think I have learned enough about nutrition to tell my young friend what he had better eat -- eat it and like it, unless he wants to suffer a breakdown before he's forty."

With that she left -- taking her book with her. I was rather sorry, for I do like new cookbooks, especially if they contain Chinese proverbs.

By the way -- speaking of China -- we're going to talk about rice tomorrow. Have your pencils ready if you want a good recipe for "Spanish Rice."

Tomorrow: "Chiefly About Rice."

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